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ABSTRACT

The author traces developments in the education of children with learning disabilities and comments on implications for teacher education. He suggests that a critical neglect of the study of cognition exists. The cognitive orientation, which includes emphases on active participation, student responsibility and long-term acquisitions, is discussed, and classroom organization principles (such as lower student-teacher ratios and a high degree of structure in the classroom) are cited. Parallels between issues confronting learning disabilities and teacher education are drawn, including overreliance on traditional practice and neglect of empirical data, overemphasis on empathy rather than basic skill instruction, and too much concern about declining enrollments and loss of financial support. He suggests that educators have themselves been guilty of dyslogia--problems with thinking--by not foreseeing the crisis in teacher education. Among four recommendations are that more effort be put into recruitment and retention in teacher education and that disciplines increase cooperation to provide better teacher education programs. (CL)

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"The Dyslogic Syndrome"
Some Improbable Implications To Teacher Education

An Essay Presented to:
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I. INTRODUCTION

One can easily guess from the flippant title assigned to these remarks, that this presentation will deal with a rather narrow topic with a surface appeal to only a specialized constituency. My actual plan however is to convert the issue of dyslogia into a vehicle for confronting much broader issues which challenge nearly every professional involved in the daily practice of education. Whether one be a college dean or university professor, a doctoral advisor or dissertation writer, a school principal or cooperating teacher, a worried parent or an irrate taxpayer, a state Governor or the Secretary of the Department of Education, it is difficult to escape culpability for the genuine and imagined chaos and decline which is said to characterize modern educational goals and practices.

This essay, then, will attempt to draw a parallel between the confusion which has characterized the learning disabilities field and selected issues which trouble teacher education at this very moment.

With this sparse background, the stage is set to address the notion of dyslogia from the perspective of its relationship to teacher education. Thus the title of this essay: "The Dyslogic Syndrome - Some Improbable Implications to Teacher Education."

II. A GLANCE BACKWARDS AND INWARDS

The notion of learning disabilities has had a rich, though controversial theoretical history, a legacy of professional jurisdictional disputes, a background of multidisciplinary but vested interests, and a social-political genesis which is directly tracable to the civil rights movements of the 1960's. Put another way, like many other ideas about education, the concept of learning disabilities is in some ways more a by-product of socio-political factors than an outgrowth of a rational or demonstrable argument.

It may be of interest to many of you who are not old timers on the campus that this history is reflected in the maturing processes of special education at the university level across the United States. Courses with titles and descriptors such as "medical aspects, neurological reorganization, perceptual training, modality preference," and "psycholinguistics" have yielded to such contemporary terms such as "behavior modification, precision teaching, task analysis, parenting, due process," and "IEPs."

At many universities the faculties have had difficulty in deciding whether learning disabilities was the responsibility of the psychology department, speech department, reading area, or the curriculum and instruction department; whether the course work should be limited to graduate programs of study, whether learning disabilities

and reading could beneficially associate with one another, whether learning disability strategies could be mainstreamed, whether a college should sponsor a learning disability clinic or a reading clinic or neither, and finally what learning disabilities course competencies are and who should define them.

At the state level, the pattern of chaos has been equally severe. There is concern about the high incidence of learning disabilities in general, but there is an even more specific concern about the seemingly disproportionate enrollments of minority students within these programs. The content, organization, and methodologies which are thought best for learning disabilities common school classes are the subject of continued debate among our professors and within the literature. The place of the learning disabled college student in the university campus has also caused much concern.

Nationally, a current controversy rages over the proposed "deregulation" of learning disabilities through changes in PL 94-142. However, few proponents or antagonists provide much data or logic to support their respective positions. It is more a case of might makes right. Whether the special education lobbies are mightier than the resolve of Secretary Bell and his "Reaganites" is yet to be determined.

The common school curriculum and the university teacher education programs in learning disabilities have been tossed, bounced, and swamped--though not sunk--by a relentless barrage of fadisms, emotionalisms, authoritarianisms, commercialisms, and publisherisms. In my personal recollections, only the area of reading instruction has been inflicted by a more dire fate, and I am not certain the learning disabilities is a very distant second.

At this point, it should be beginning to be clear where the discussion is headed. But if you'll indulge me by allowing a little more specificity, my purposes will reveal themselves in all of their glory. The development of educational services for children with learning disabilities has been dominated by at least five major influences during my twenty year career (that's about a duration of four years per fad) which are pertinent to this discussion.

- (1) The initial learning disability definitions and intervention strategies were characterized by a strong neurological flavor.
- (2) Eye-training and strephosymbolia then claimed a place in the sun.
- (3) Diagnostic and educational practices began to focus almost exclusively on the perceptual and perceptual-motor components of the condition.
- (4) A short time later, the psycholinguistic model became prominent, and it appeared that at last the

underlying process proponents had found an enduring champion.

- (5) But alas, more recently behavior modification, task analysis and similar by-product of Skinnerianism have run rampant through the field.

Somewhat sequentially, the learning disability "congregation" has eagerly been "converted" to one "theology" after another. We have successively become "evangelists" of Delacato and Cruickshank, Getman and Orton, Frostig and Kephart, Kirk and McCarthy, Skinner and Haring. Happily, there is some evidence that the tyranny of the behavioral objective et. al. may succumb to a more rational perspective among the current professional vanguard. What lessons have been learned from this history? Not many I am afraid. Although much of the criticism of early practices in learning disabilities were clearly justified, the accompanying disdain for any approach which postulates a remedial relationship between thinking and learning disabilities is indeed regrettable.

Unfortunately, the waning of the interest in neurological, perceptual, psycholinguistic, and behavior modification approaches has contributed to a critical neglect of the study of cognition. It seems a little like the proverbial "throwing the baby out with the bath."

By this time, the keen observer of the contemporary teacher education scene has begun to sense the parallels.

As a special educator, however, I do not take much consolation in the knowledge that learning disabilities as a field does not hold exclusive proprietary rights on fallacious educational reasoning.

III. A GLIMPSE OF THE COGNITIVE ORIENTATION

I am pleased to be able to report to you that there has been a new strand afoot during the past few years which should contribute to a fresh examination of the role of the basic psychological processes among the learning disabled. It may be that this renewed interest in cognition will also have some impact on the teaching of reading and mathematics to groups other than the learning disabled. Coupled with what we have learned about teacher effectiveness in promoting student achievement, the implications of the cognitive approach to basic literacy, admission standards, competency-based curriculum, the dismal performance of selected students on basic skills tests and certification residency programs seem bountiful.

The limitations of essays such as this will not allow me to offer more than a quick glimpse of the cognitive orientation. I do want to emphasize that this approach is more than a resurrection of modern mathematics, a restatement of the process science approach, or a repackaging of SOI programs for the intellectually gifted. I must readily concede, however, that the focus such

programs give to attention, perception, memory and reasoning is shared by many of those who sponsor a cognitive orientation. In this sense, what is being proposed is really not anything radically new. Much of what has been found to be valuable among current special education practices should be retained. Another way to say it is that behavioral modification techniques and allied approaches need to be tempered with some good old common sense. Teaching thinking skills is one such moderating influence.

It is appropriate at this stage of our discussion to quickly mention several of the more salient characteristics of the cognitive orientation. Succinctly put, this approach emphasises:

1. The need for the learner to be an active participant in the constructin of meaning.
2. The goal of making the child responsible for his own learning.
3. The view that only instructional strategies which lead to long-term acquisitions are valid.
4. The notion that the basic pyschological processes and academics are one.

The many proponents of the various methodologies in the cognitive camp report many fine distinctions among themselves. However, most of those sympathetic to this viewpoint would probably agree that the approach is child centered rather than curriculum centered, and that complex

thinking skills cannot be dismembered into components parts and still retain their integrity. They would very likely agree that individuals learn in many other ways than by passively reacting to stimuli and storing the consequences of their actions in a memory bank. Children learn by watching other children, by imitating their parents, by watching TV, by reading books, and even by listening to a teacher lecture. Sometimes they learn without drill, without rewards, without charts, and without physical activity. In this approach, the higher order thinking processes are given a top priority. Why should training and practice in advanced logical thinking be left only to gifted students. Attention is not viewed as a fixed condition of the individual. Perception is not conceived as a discrete faculty. Memory is not characterized as a static warehouse of facts. Rather than being prerequisites to thinking, these attributes are functions of active information processing. Thinking is an entity which consists of a whole whose totality is greater than the sum of its parts.

Those who adhere to the cognitive orientation suspect that learning disabled, limited English proficient, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students suffer from maturation lags and inefficient learning strategies which does more to separate them from their higher achieving peers than was ever appreciated in the past. These high-risk learners fail to make as much use of verbal mediation,

cognitive elaborations, chunking, labeling, systematic progress checks, rehearsal, self-structuring and related strategies as do their higher achieving classmates. It could be that all education majors need to master these strategies.

The solution in part is to view learning as a set of elaborations on what the child already knows rather than the mastery of a series of subsets of information which when properly placed together will comprise a whole. This orientation operates on the assumption that children have a picture of a "whole" which allows them to organize the "parts" into an overall concept. It can be seen that this is a very different emphasis than one finds among those who exclusively advocate behavior modification and other second generation derivatives of Skinnerianism.

This emphasis on cognition ties in positively with what seems to be working fairly well in many special education programs. As I point to those factors which characterize model instructional programs for the learning disabled, you will recognize principles and styles which seem to promote academic achievement among all children. Perhaps there are implications to teacher education as well!

The successful teacher of the learning disabled is characterized by a friendly and supportive attitude much in the tradition of Glasser and his three "C's". These teachers set a personal example of competency in knowledge

of their subject matter and a clear grasp of the characteristics and deficiencies of the children they teach. High expectations are held for the students--they are not excused because they are disabled or handicapped. A variety of techniques are used, but modeling and frequent monitoring are high on the list. In other words, the teacher of the learning disabled knows that he/she is in charge of the classroom, but the learning disabled student must accept responsibility for his/her own work and ultimate success or failure.

The practices which seem to set the exemplary learning disabilities teacher apart from many others, however, seems to be the priority given to the organization of the classroom for the purposes of instruction. Here are some of those factors:

1. Teacher-student ratios tend to be lower than other classes.
2. The curriculum is matched to the current educational levels of the students.
3. The classroom is highly structured, well organized, and effectively managed.
4. Students are made to feel responsible for their own work and are very actively involved in their own learning.

5. The curriculum focuses on essential learnings which are committed to long term memory and functional applications.
6. Ample time for practice, review, and reflection is allowed.
7. Intensive monitoring occurs to maximize the amount of time the students are on task.
8. Instructional activities, assignments, questioning techniques, and tests are designed to produce a high rate of success.
9. Systematic progress checks are made to increase the amount of feedback.

IV THE COGNITIVE ORIENTATION IGNORED

The discussion up to this point may lead one to falsely conclude that there was a time in special education when teaching approaches were suspect, but that current practices are exemplary now that the cognitive orientation has emerged. No characterization could be further from reality.

In the field of learning disabilities, we find ourselves in a situation that appears patently ridiculous to outsiders. We still have learning disability students creeping and crawling, mastering phonics in high school, following K-P diets, doing their perceptual learning disability remediation and receiving weekly eye-training.

Yet the same students are still manifesting achievement profiles which show modest gains until the third grade, and then flatten out into a pattern of gross underachievement which worsens throughout the high school years. Other groups of students (bilingual, Chapter I, migrant) show similarly declining achievement profiles.

We find markedly disproportionate numbers of minority and bilingual students in our programs for children with learning disabilities. We have not yet even begun to cope with the issue of intellectually gifted children who also happen to be learning disabled. There is evidence that the average intelligence quotient of today's learning disabled student is substantially lower than it was ten years ago.

This confusion and these distortions exists in spite of the fact that special educators have known for years that the exotic remedial programs which focus on retraining the eye and reorganizing the brain have little empirically demonstrated value if any at all. Yet, in too many settings we persist.

Special education was burned badly during the late 1960's and early 1970's by the accusations that our testing procedures were discriminatory and the programs for exceptionoal children wrongly stigmatized many minority students. Yet, in to many settings we persist.

We have known from the beginning, that learning disabled children exhibited serious thinking problems. Yet,

we persist in neglecting science, mathematics and formal thinking skills.

We have rushed headlong into mainstreaming based primarily on political and sociological factors, rather than on demonstrated efficiency. The mainstreaming trend continues, and we cannot substantiate its overall effectiveness. Yet, we persist in frantically bouncing from one quick fix to another.

There exists a sound body of theoretically sound and empirically verified knowledge upon which to base the special education curriculum and the college of education curriculum for teachers of exceptional children. We have inexplicably elected to at the very least ignore the data, but much worse, we have too often failed to translate this knowledge into meaningful teacher education practices.

V. SOME PARALLELS BETWEEN LEARNING DISABILITIES AND TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Every thoughtful special educator who has ever observed the neglect of the cognitive approach in the face of evidence that it accurately focuses our attention on the essence of a learning disability, is compelled to ask, "How could this have happened?" Perhaps, even more importantly the question is, "How can we get back on the correct course?"

Even though the questions which confront teacher trainers in the field of learning disabilities are quite discomforting to the special educator, little relief can be found by an examination of general practices in teacher education. This essay began with a recitation of some of these difficulties. What is especially interesting as pointed out earlier is that there are substantial parallels between the issues which confront special education in particular and teacher education in general. For the purposes of this paper, ten of these parallels have been stated in the form of questions.

TEN QUESTIONS ABOUT LEARNING DISABILITIES

1. Is the field of learning disabilities too concerned about declining enrollments and the loss of the financial support such decreases generate?
2. Is the field of learning disabilities placing too many minority and slow students, while ignoring others such as the bright and talented who are also learning disabled?
3. Is the field of learning disabilities giving too much emphasis to such efforts as the remediation of

TEN QUESTIONS ABOUT TEACHER EVALUATION

1. Are teacher education programs too concerned about declining enrollments and the loss of the financial support such decreases generate?
2. Are teacher education programs accepting too many academically limited students, while ignoring others such as the bright and talented especially among minority and bilingual populations?
3. Are teacher education programs giving too much emphasis to the remediation of reading, writing, calculating, and speaking deficits

perceptual deficits
and too little
attention to
comprehension,
problem solving, and
other thinking skills?

4. Is the field of learning disabilities giving too much emphasis to "how it feels to be handicapped" and too little attention to "what to teach" the learning disabled?
5. Is the field of learning disabilities placing adequate emphasis on the university and public school levels alike on the skills of effective instruction?
6. Is the field of learning disabilities giving too much attention to the inertia of traditional practices, and too little emphasis to empirical feelings?
7. Are professors of learning disabilities too little inclined to teach their college students in a way they would want them to emulate when they in turn teach learning disabled children?
8. Is the field of learning disabilities failing to attract adequate numbers of

of their candidates,
too little attention to
the skills of basic
logic and advanced
reasoning?

4. Are teacher education programs giving too much emphasis to how perspective teachers can "get kids in touch with their feelings" too little attention to basic academics, speaking, and thinking abilities?
5. Are teacher education programs placing adequate emphasis at the university and public school levels alike on the skills of effective instruction?
6. Are teacher education programs giving too attention to the inertia of traditional practices, and too little emphasis to empirical feelings?
7. Are professors of education too little inclined to teach their college students in a way they would want them to emulate when they in turn teach our children in the public schools?
8. Are teaching education programs failing to attract adequate numbers of

academically able
students into teaching?

9. Is the field of learning disabilities failing to adequately bring together the various academic disciplines which comprise the field?
10. Is the field of learning disabilities engaged in too little advocacy to make their publics aware of their problems and to promote appropriate solutions?

academically able
students into teaching?

9. Are teaching education programs failing to adequately bring together various academic disciplines which comprise the field?
10. Are teacher educators engaged in too little advocacy to make their publics aware of their problems and to promote appropriate solutions?

VI. IMPLICATIONS

If you could set aside for a moment the skill with which these questions were constructed, and accept the spirit in which they were formed, many of us would answer "yes" to most of them.

Certainly the author's answer to each and every one of these questions is a personal "yes". Yes, there are problems in the field of learning disabilities. Yes, these difficulties are not only a reflection of similar problems in teacher education, but they are also a significant source of those problems.

Teacher education in the United States is not a national system. There is no one supreme authority which acts as a board of regents for the thousands of teacher education programs in our country. Teacher education is not

even a discipline to itself. It is made up of professionals who represent hundreds of fields and specialities. If each of us were to examine our own small corner of the world of teacher education, we would probably answer yes. Yes, there are parallels between other fields and teacher education just like there are parallels between learning disabilities and teacher education. That is because each and every one of our smaller disciplines is one component of this large, non-system we call teacher education. We not only parallel one another, we are collectively the whole of teacher education.

If the problems of the field of learning disabilities and every other smaller field are to be resolved, the corrective efforts must be carried out within a broader context. If teacher education is to prosper, it must bring into its professional sphere all of the smaller components such as the field of learning disabilities.

No example, perhaps, is more poignant to me than the instance of the cognitive approach to teaching children. This orientation appears to hold promise in early childhood education, remedial reading, special education, disadvantaged education, migrant education, and bilingual education. Elements of this concept can be found in Instructional Enrichment, Mastery Learning, and the models emerging from effective instruction research. The extent to which we can learn from one another is surely impressive.

VII. DYSLOGIC SYNDROME

How does dyslogic syndrome fit into all of these? I hope by now the implications are not as farfetched as they might have seemed earlier.

Dyslogia is to the thinking problems of severely learning disabled students what dyslexia is to their reading problems. It refers to a significant impairment in logical thinking and judgement which is seen in deficient problem solving strategies. In short, it is at the very heart of the achievement and adjustment difficulties of learning disabled students. The cognitive orientation clearly holds the brightest promise for the future. Yet, dyslogia and the cognitive approach have been seriously neglected in the literature until very recently. This may be due in part to our fascination with gadgetry and quick fixes, and in part due to a failure to focus on the details of a problem and to raise questions about where we are headed.

Those of us in the learning disabilities field have known for a long time that our students basically have problems with thinking. However, we have failed to ask those hard questions. Therefore, we have had difficulties staying on target. Like dyslogic children we have been distracted. It is time for some clear thinking.

Those of us who are committed to teacher education have been slow to see our problems coming. We have allowed a crisis to develop. Like dyslogic children, we have failed

to predict well. Therefore, we have been put on the defensive. We have permitted others to do our thinking for us. It is time for some clear action.

This essay has modestly pointed out that each segment of the teacher education profession has contributed to the difficulties which challenge us at this very moment. Sometimes we have failed to pull together to the extent we might have. There have even been meaningless jurisdictional disputes and petty jealousies within our profession. One of the major prescriptions offered here concerns this lack of collegiality.

If learning disabilities specialists and others are to adequately address such problems as teaching children with dyslogic syndrome, then the broad issues of teacher education must be addressed with vigor. Teacher education must form a partnership with public and private schools. Colleges of Education must be an integral part of their universities engaging in multidisciplinary teaching and research. Professors of education must demand excellence in student performances and in their own teaching, but especially in research, writing, and public speaking. The perception of education as an undistinguished profession must be reversed. If teacher education is to perform as a true profession, then each of its various disciplines, no matter how small, must do their share. If, for example, the potential of the cognitive orientation is to be tested, the

relevant teacher education disciplines must come together as one profession. It is in this spirit that the author has tried to demonstrate the improbable implications of the dyslogic syndrome to teacher education.

VIII. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper argues that the problems of preparing teachers to work with the learning disabled have parallels in general teacher education. Ten questions were posed to highlight these similarities. The cognitive orientation was presented as an example of an approach which might not only prove useful to children with dyslogic syndrome but also to children in such diverse programs as early childhood education, bilingual education, remedial reading, and migrant education. It was suggested, that like dyslogic children, teacher educators have been distracted from their main task, have failed to examine the facts adequately, and have not accurately predicted outcomes. This has lead to a crisis in education which in part can be resolved by the many disciplines of teacher education coming together as one profession of teacher education.

America needs people who can think, our schools need teachers who can teach children to think, and teacher education needs to recruit thinking faculty who can prepare thinking teachers. We drifted unthinkingly into an educational crisis in America. Orderly thinking together

can help us find our way out of the crisis. More specifically it is recommended that:

1. Intensive efforts be made to recruit and retain top scholars into teacher education. This will require many different thrusts, but it clearly involves governmental and private sector monies for scholarships and grants; improved salaries and working conditions; and finally a significant degree of cooperation among the universities, public and private schools, state and federal education agencies, and professional associations. It means supporting honors programs and professional associations within teacher education departments. It will require greater attention to the needs of the bright and talented especially among minority populations.
2. Professional organizations such as the Association of Teacher Education must work even harder to bring our many primary and allied disciplines together in a spirit of collegiality which transcends the jealousies and jurisdictional disputes which have been too characteristic of contemporary practices. Professors must get out into the schools and elementary and secondary faculty must have a more central role in the teacher education process. Exchanges between classroom teachers and

universities cannot help but be mutually beneficial. Such interactions will help get the latest research into the schools and will help focus scholarship on very practical curricular and instructional problems.

3. Thinking must become a key aspect of all instruction. This may well mean a return to the best of the basics with a new emphasis on thinking outcomes. Formal thinking skills must be systematically taught to college of education students if we expect them to teach children how to think. The essential basics now consist of four Rs; reading writing, arithmetic, and reasoning. Actual coursework in logic may be appropriate, but it is strongly urged that the cognitive domain reign in teacher education courses. It also means more mathematics and science for teachers. All of this in time will require inservice education for college, secondary and elementary teachers.
4. Excellence in education as a goal has never been omitted from the professional literature, but in recent decades high expectations of quality have yielded to issues of equity. People who hold teaching jobs must again become members of a distinguished profession. This means placing

demands on ourselves, on our students, on our universities and on our common schools.

The dyslogic syndrome not only finds parallels in teacher education, the symptoms seem to have captured it. This essay has tried to suggest some ways to free ourselves from this unthinking pattern through some humorous comparisons to dyslogia.

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